

Spring butterflies on the Greek island of Sifnos

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The island of Sifnos belongs to the Cyclades, a group of islands in the western Aegean Sea. It has an area of about 83 square kilometres and bears a latitude of approximately 37 degrees north. Its highest peak, Profitis Ilias, has an altitude of 695 metres above sea level. The western and northern part of the island is generally rocky and dry and supports a poor vegetation consisting mostly of shrub and dwarf juniper trees. An exception to this is the gorge running east-west from the village of Apollonia to the village of Kamares, which has a stream and therefore is capable of supporting a lush and more varied vegetation. The eastern side of the island is more level and retains much of its soil, due also in part to extensive terracing. These conditions have enhanced the cultivation of vegetable gardens, cereal fields, orchards and olive groves. In Spring there is also a profusion of wild flowers, that reach their peak by end April and die out almost completely by mid-June.

Collecting took place on two separate occasions, end April and end May. The butterflies recorded were few both in species and specimens and were found to inhabit mostly wind-protected areas. Another aspect worth noting is the apparent lack of definable subspecies, all species examined being referable to Greek Mainland forms.

PAPILIONIDAE

1. *Iphiclides podalirius* Linnaeus. End April and end May. A few in orchards and gardens. Exambela; Firoya; Kamares gorge.

PIERIDAE

2. *Pieris brassicae* Linnaeus. End April. In fair numbers, mostly in gardens and fields. Katavati; Firoya; Exambela. Some specimens very small.
3. *Artogeia rapae* Linnaeus. End April. Rare, as a rule in fields. Apollonia; Katavati; near Kastro; Kamares gorge.
4. *Pontia daplidice* Linnaeus. End April. Only two recorded in fields. Near Kastro; Firoya.
5. *Euchloe ausonia* Hübner. End April. Scarce in fields and waste places with yellow-flowered cruciferae. Individuals of the so-called first brood going over, while those of the so-called second brood just emerging; often the two forms flying together. Katavati; Firoya; Skafi; Plati Yalos.
6. *Colias crocea* Fourcroy. End April. A few over rough terrain and in fields. Near Kastro; Kamares gorge; Skafi.
7. *Gonepteryx cleopatra* Linnaeus. End April in tatters, presumably from hibernation; end May freshly emerged; on both occasions in fair numbers. Hillsides overlooking Kamares gorge; Skafi; Gourna. Seen laying eggs on underside of young leaves of a small, creeping *Rhamnus* species, also characterised by small size of leaves.

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NYMPHALIDAE

8. *Vanessa atalanta* Linnaeus. End April. A few recorded, mostly in gardens. Katavati; Firoya; Kamares gorge.
9. *Vanessa cardui* Linnaeus. End April. In fair numbers in fields, gardens and waste places. Firoya; near Kalambelas.
10. *Polygonia egea* Cramer. End April. A single specimen on a rocky hillside at Vasalou.

SATYRIDAE

11. *Maniola jurtina* Linnaeus. Confirmed by male genitalia. A single male end April; in fair numbers end May. In fields and gorges. Firoya; near Skafi; Kamares gorge.
12. *Lasiommata megera* Linnaeus. End April. Two females in tatters, one in a rock strewn area of Kamares gorge, the other on a rocky hillside by Vasalou.

LYCAENIDAE

13. *Callophrys rubi* Linnaeus. End April, in fair numbers. Exclusively at bottom of dry gorges between Firoya and Skafi. Seen most often resting on end leaves of pistacio bushes and juniper trees.
14. *Lycaena phlaeas* Linnaeus. End April, in fair numbers. Found on roadsides, in fields and gorges. Skafi; Gourná; Katavati; Artemona; Kamares gorge.
15. *Syntarucus pirithous* Linnaeus. End April. A couple recorded at Kamares gorge.
16. *Glaucopsyche alexis* Poda. End April. Rather scarce and localised in places where a yellow-flowered, thorny, woody leguminous bush grows in numbers and which probably represents its larval foodplant. Males indistinguishable from form flying in Attica, on the mainland. Females dark brown upperside, occasionally with faint blue dusting at base of wings. Found along bottom and sides of dry gorges and on rough hillsides. Gourná; Vasalou; between Firoya and Skafi.
17. *Pseudophilotes vicrama schiffermuelleri* Hemming. End April. A few on rough hillsides and in the vicinity of thyme bushes. Skafi; Gourná; Vasalou; Kouni; Aghia Maria.
18. *Polyommatus icarus* Rottemburg. End April. A couple of males at bottom of Kamares gorge, associated with a pink-flowered, thorny, low leguminous bush.

HESPERIIDAE

19. *Carcharodus alceae* Esper. End April. Recorded only occasionally along roadsides and in waste places. Firoya; Kamares gorge; Ormos Kastrou.

The obvious paucity of butterflies on Sifnos island is probably due to the dryness of the island, its poor flora, its geographic isolation, its small land mass and the adverse effect of the strong winds, known as meltemia, which prevail during the months of July, August and September.